

IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE DISTRICT OF MINNESOTA

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

v.

MITCHELL JAMES OTTINGER

**FILED UNDER SEAL PURSUANT TO 18
U.S.C. § 3509(d)(2) AND LOCAL RULE
39.1(c)(1)(G)**

Case No. 21-MJ-340 (ECW)

AFFIDAVIT IN SUPPORT OF A CRIMINAL COMPLAINT

I, Matthew Vogel, being first duly sworn, hereby depose and state as follows:

INTRODUCTION AND AGENT BACKGROUND

1. I am a Special Agent of the United States Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), and have been so employed since July 2010. I am currently assigned to the Minneapolis Division and the Minnesota Child Exploitation Task Force, where my investigative responsibilities include investigation of child sexual abuse and exploitation crimes such as production, possession, receipt, and distribution of child pornography. I have gained knowledge and experience through training at the FBI Academy, in service training, and everyday work in conducting these types of investigations. I have received training in the area of child pornography and child exploitation investigations and have reviewed numerous examples of child pornography as defined at 18 U.S.C. § 2256, in various forms of media, including computer media.

2. I am an “investigative or law enforcement officer” of the United States within the meaning of 18 U.S.C. § 2510(7), and am empowered by 18 U.S.C §§ 3052 and 3107 to conduct investigations of, and to make arrests for, violations of federal criminal statutes.

PURPOSE OF AFFIDAVIT

3. I make this affidavit in support of an application for a Criminal Complaint charging MITCHELL JAMES OTTINGER (DOB XX/XX/1996¹) a/k/a “Rachel Meyer” and “Taylor Malek” (hereinafter OTTINGER) with Threats via Interstate Communications in violation of 18 U.S.C. § 875(d), and Production of Child Pornography and Attempted Production of Child Pornography in violation of 18 U.S.C. §§ 2251(a) and (e).

4. To date, OTTINGER has used several Internet accounts to encourage and direct minors to create sexually explicit images and videos² of themselves to send to OTTINGER. To obtain child pornography, OTTINGER used techniques commonly referred to as “catfishing” or “baiting,”³ and generally involve OTTINGER posing as a young female using the alias or “Taylor Malek” or “Rachel Meyer,” with a sexual or romantic interest in a victim. If a victim acquiesced to “Rachel” or “Taylor’s” requests for a sexually explicit image, and later blocked or ignored “her,” OTTINGER would contact

¹ Per local rules and 18 U.S.C. § 3509, I have partially redacted personally identifying information, such as dates of birth, from this affidavit. Unless otherwise noted, this information is known to me and available to the Court.

² For brevity, I have referred to such files collectively as “images” throughout this affidavit.

³ From my training and experience, I am aware that these terms refer to the act of using a fictitious online persona to lure another person into an online relationship of some sort—often with the goal of obtaining sexually explicit images of the other person. In my training and experience, I am also aware that many adults engage in such “catfishing” by posing as minors online in order to lure actual minors into taking and sending sexually explicit images and videos of themselves.

the victim—as “Taylor” or “Rachel”—using a different account and threaten to publish the victim’s sexually explicit image(s) to friends or family unless additional demands for sexually explicit images were met. This conduct is sometimes referred to as “sextortion”—a portmanteau of “sex” or “sexual” and “extortion.” Specifically:

- a) Count 1: Between on or about June 21, 2020 and on or about June 22, 2020, in the District of Minnesota and elsewhere, MITCHELL JAMES OTTINGER attempted to and did employ, use, persuade, induce, entice, and coerce [REDACTED] who was then approximately 15 years old, to engage in sexually explicit conduct for the purpose of producing a visual depiction of such conduct, knowing and having reason to know that such visual depiction would be transported using any means and facility of interstate and foreign commerce, transported in and affecting interstate and foreign commerce, and was produced and transmitted using materials that had been mailed, shipped, and transported in and affecting interstate and foreign commerce by any means, including by computer.
- b) Count 2: On or about June 22, 2020, in the District of Minnesota and elsewhere, MITCHELL JAMES OTTINGER knowingly and with intent to extort a thing of value from [REDACTED] specifically one or more sexually explicit images of [REDACTED] did transmit in interstate and foreign commerce a communication containing a threat to injure the reputation of the [REDACTED]
- c) Count 3: Between on or about July 21, 2020 through on or about July 22, 2020, in the District of Minnesota and elsewhere, MITCHELL JAMES OTTINGER attempted to and did employ, use, persuade, induce, entice, and coerce [REDACTED] who was then approximately 15 years old, to engage in sexually-explicit conduct for the purpose of producing a visual depiction of such conduct knowing and having reason to know that such visual depiction would be transported using any means and facility of interstate and foreign commerce, transported in and affecting interstate and foreign commerce, and was produced and transmitted using materials that had been mailed, shipped, and transported in and affecting interstate and foreign commerce by any means, including by computer.
- d) Count 4: On or about January 16, 2021, in the District of Minnesota and elsewhere, MITCHELL JAMES OTTINGER, with intent to extort a thing of value from [REDACTED] an identified adult, specifically one or more sexually explicit images of [REDACTED] did transmit in interstate and foreign commerce a communication containing a threat to injure the reputation of [REDACTED]

5. The facts set forth in this affidavit come from my personal observations, my training and experience, evidence gathered pursuant to search warrants and administrative subpoenas, and information obtained from other law enforcement officers, victims, and witnesses. Because this affidavit is submitted for the limited purpose of securing a criminal complaint, it does not include every fact known to me or to other investigators.

PROBABLE CAUSE

CATFISHING/BAITING AND SEXTORTION OF [REDACTED]

6. This investigation began when, on or about July 22, 2020, [REDACTED] then age 15, contacted the FBI's National Threat Operations Center telephonically. A second clarifying telephonic interview was conducted on or about August 6, 2020, and a third brief telephonic interview was conducted on or about September 25, 2020. In summary, during those interviews [REDACTED] reported that he resides outside of Minnesota and contacted the FBI himself because he did not want his parents to know what happened. [REDACTED] believed he had been "catfished" by an individual using the name "Rachel Meyer" into taking and sending sexually explicit images of himself via MMS⁴ message.

7. [REDACTED] reported that on the evening of July 22, 2020, he was contacted by user "rachm786" on a social media application (hereinafter "the application").⁵ "rachm786"

⁴ Multi-media Message Service. A MMS message may contain text, images, or small video files and is usually sent and received on a mobile device's text messaging application.

⁵ In my training and experience, I am aware that the application is a mobile application. The application is designed to "randomly" connect users and allow users to trade pictures, specifically "selfies," via the internet. One of the intended safety features of application is

claimed to be a minor and asked [REDACTED] to exchange sexually explicit images with her. The conversation transitioned from the application to MMS messages. [REDACTED] used his phone and the alias “Jake.” “Rachel Meyer” sent MMS messages via rachelmeyer786@gmail.com.^{6,7} [REDACTED] complied with “Rachel Meyer’s” request and sent nude photographs to “Rachel Meyer.” “Rachel Meyer” asked to see [REDACTED]’s driver’s permit to verify his age. [REDACTED] complied, but only showed the date of birth and photograph portions of the document. After [REDACTED] sent the nude images, “Rachel Meyer” told [REDACTED] she was 18 years of age and demanded more sexually explicit photos. “Rachel Meyer” stated if [REDACTED] did not comply with her demands, she would send the nude photos of [REDACTED] she already had to his friends. [REDACTED] then blocked “Rachel Meyer.”

a requirement that users authenticate their identity by sending live images from their self-facing camera upon registration. I have anonymized the name of the application, which I can supply to the Court upon request.

⁶ It is possible to send and receive MMS messages via email by using the mobile telephony provider’s designated email messaging service. One way of doing so is to enter the mobile device’s “email address.” The username is the ten digit mobile telephone number. A simple Internet search will reveal the telephone service provider and associated email to MMS domain name. The “email address” for a mobile phone number then takes the format 1234567890@phone-company-domain.com.

⁷ As further discussed below, the investigation involved search warrants for the contents of this account. The communications described by [REDACTED] were not found in the email account’s contents. In my training and experience, I am aware one possible reason for this could be that the user may have deleted the message from the account after it was sent.

8. Shortly thereafter, [REDACTED] received a text message from XXX-XXX-6740. [REDACTED] blocked that number as well. [REDACTED] then received another text message from XXX-XXX-6234 stating that if [REDACTED] did not send additional nude images, “Rachel Meyer” would distribute the images [REDACTED] already sent. [REDACTED] also blocked that number and deleted all of the communications. Both of these numbers had Minnesota area codes.

9. On or about September 22, 2020, [REDACTED] received a text message from rachm786@gmail.com reading, “Hey Jake.” [REDACTED] did not respond to the message.

10. The two telephone numbers listed above, -6740 and -6234, are assigned to TextNow, Inc. TextNow is an Internet based service that allows users to make calls and send text messages to standard mobile telephones over mobile telephony networks on a mobile or desktop computer. Such services are commonly referred to as Voice over Internet Protocol or VoIP services. TextNow offers an ad-supported free tier of service, as well as paid tiers. Users are able to easily acquire and dispose of phone numbers and no identity verification is required to register for or use the service. I am aware from my training and experience that child pornographers use services such as TextNow because it is a free or cost-effective way to engage in illegal communications which are not easily traced to the user by other participants in the communications. This is so because TextNow users do not have to purchase and register new phones, SIM cards, or service plans. They can enroll by simply providing an email address and use any number of telephone numbers on the same device. I am also aware that TextNow sends emails to account holders with notifications about telephone numbers assigned to their accounts.

11. On or about August 18, 2020, an FBI Minneapolis analyst searched for information about the location of the developer or business responsible for the application. The analyst sent an email to the listed “contact us” address for the application and inquired about their location for service of legal process. In reply, a representative requested the username of the account under investigation. The FBI analyst replied that the account under investigation was “rachm786.” Later that day, the application representative voluntarily provided certain information about the account. According to that information, the account was created on July 21, 2020, and was active until at least on or about August 17, 2020. The user self-reported location information was “Hudson.” Self-reported gender was female. Without being asked to do so, a representative or representatives from the application reviewed the contents of the account and voluntarily reported that the user “is asking for people number, and then he stop chatting.” The application also voluntarily provided the user’s authentication images and information about the user’s identity authentication. The application confirmed that the user-submitted authentication images must be uploaded from a live camera and cannot come from stored image galleries. The authentication images consisted of four still images depicting an adult male wearing what appears to be a light blue tank top with white lettering. The individual is seen making certain hand signals corresponding with similar graphic hand signals superimposed on the photograph (*i.e.*, a closed fist, a thumb up).

12. I have reviewed the images sent by the application and found that the individual depicted in the images bears a significant resemblance to known images of OTTINGER.

13. On or about January 20, 2021, TextNow, Inc. provided records responsive to an administrative subpoena for information associated with the -6740 and -6234 telephone numbers used to text [REDACTED] after [REDACTED] blocked messages from “Rachel Meyer.” According to TextNow, Inc. subscriber and registration records, the -6740 number was assigned to account ID “bmike7406” between July 7, 2020 at 4:00:00 A.M. UTC⁸ and September 24, 2020 at 3:59:59 UTC. The “bmike7406” TextNow account was created with bmike7406@gmail.com as the registration address on September 20, 2019. The “bmike7406” account was created on IP address⁹ 75.72.114.49. According to Google LLC records, the same IP address was used to access taylorlmaek3758@gmail.com, rachelmeyer786@gmail.com, and rachm786@gmail.com. According to TextNow, Inc.

⁸ An abbreviation for Universal Time Coordinated, which is an international coordinated time scale.

⁹ A unique number or series of numbers and letters used by a computer to access the Internet. IP addresses can be dynamic, meaning that the ISP may assign a different unique number to a computer every time it accesses the Internet. IP addresses might also be static, if an ISP assigns a user’s computer the same IP address each time the computer accesses the Internet. The most familiar version of an IP address is IP version 4, which is a series of four numbers separated by a period, e.g., 172.16.254.1. However, in recent years IP version 6 has come unto use. IP version 6 addresses are eight groups of four hexadecimal digits with the groups separated by colons, e.g., 2001:0db8:0000:0042:0000:8a2e:0370:7334.

records, the -6234 account was assigned to account ID “ccandy7862” between July 9, 2020 at 10:54:53 P.M. UTC and August 25, 2020 at 6:07:07 A.M. UTC. The “ccandy7862” account was created with ccandy7862@gmail.com as the registration address on May 15, 2020. The “ccandy7862” account was registered on IP address 75.72.114.49, the same IP address used to access rachelmeyer786@gmail.com, rachm786@gmail.com, and other accounts described herein.

14. According to TextNow, Inc. message detail records, during the time the -6740 number was assigned to the “bmike7406” account, it was used to send or receive text messages to/from approximately 491 unique telephone numbers, including [REDACTED]’s known telephone number. TextNow, Inc. message detail records for the -6234 number for the relevant timeframe show the account was used to send or receive messages to/from approximately 30 unique telephone numbers, including [REDACTED]’s known telephone number.

15. I applied for and was granted a search warrant in District of Minnesota case 21-MJ-80 (TNL) for records and the content of communications associated with TextNow, Inc. accounts “bmike7406” and “ccandy7862.” TextNow, Inc. records contained messages from the user using aliases “Rachel Meyer” and “Taylor Malek.”

16. Those records included the contents of text messages with [REDACTED] For example, on or about July 21, 2021, the “bmike7406” account wrote the following messages:

[REDACTED]? Sorry you don’t have to. If u make me a hot video again I’ll send the one I made I just wanted to make sure u weren’t like 13.
Unblock me? I’m sorry I’ll send it you do
I’m sorry
Its Rachel say something

Sometime later, the “ccandy7862” account sent the following messages:

Unblock me and be a good boy or Iâ€™¹⁰ll show my friends who will show thereâ€™s and so on. U canâ€™t just ghost me.
Be a good boy [REDACTED]
Now

CATFISHING/BAITING AND SEXTORTION OF [REDACTED]

17. My review of the TextNow, Inc. records also revealed the “bmike7406” account contacted [REDACTED] date of birth XX/XX/2005. Messages in the account indicate OTTINGER—posing as “Rachel Meyer”—contacted [REDACTED] on or about June 21, 2020. During the approximately 27 hours following initial contact, approximately 435 messages were exchanged between “Rachel Meyer” and [REDACTED]. During the conversation, [REDACTED] reported he was entering 10th grade. “Rachel Meyer” purported to be 17 and entering 11th grade. “Rachel Meyer” repeatedly requested sexually explicit images of [REDACTED] including images of his naked genitals. “Rachel Meyer” wrote, “Just send one chest abs and dick and ill send.” From the context of the conversation, I believe “Rachel” was offering to send sexually explicit images of “herself” in exchange for images sent by [REDACTED].

18. Although there were no images retained by TextNow, Inc. pertaining to this conversation, data within the account shows image files were sent by [REDACTED] during the conversation. According to the context of the TextNow, Inc. records, [REDACTED] apparently sent

¹⁰ The text, “â€™” provided in the TextNow, Inc. records is an encoded apostrophe. I have included the text of messages verbatim as shown in the TextNow, Inc. records, including typographical errors of the messages’ writers.

at least one image of his own penis. As the conversation ended, “Rachel Meyer” suggested “she” would send ██████’s “dick pic” to a minor friend of ██████. “Rachel Meyer” wrote, “if u senf a full like u said I won’t show him ig.”¹¹ From my training and experience, as well as the context of the surrounding conversation, I believe the reference to “a full” meant an image showing ██████’s fully naked body. The conversation continued:

Rachel Meyer- If u send by 930 I won’t show him then. Deal?

██████ Idk¹² you relies I’m only 15 and your blackmailing me to send a dick pic?

Rachel Meyer- Full nude. And I’m 17.

██████ I was going to tonight but now I can’t trust you.

Rachel Meyer- That’s a lie

Rachel Meyer- Haha send or ig I’ll show him

Rachel Meyer- So

Rachel Meyer- Guess thats a yes.

19. On or about March 15, 2021, ██████ was interviewed by an FBI Child/Adolescent Forensic Interviewer. I observed the audio/video recorded interview. ██████ recalled the above conversations and confirmed that he took and sent a photograph of his naked penis at “Rachel Meyer’s” direction. ██████ hoped that by complying with “Rachel Meyer’s” “annoying and aggressive” requests, she would leave ██████ alone. ██████ described the image as a “selfie” he took in front of the bathroom mirror at his home. His naked penis was visible in the image.

20. ██████ attends a school in SCHOOL DISTRICT 1.

¹¹ An abbreviation for “I guess.”

¹² An abbreviation for “I don’t know.”

CATFISHING/BAITING AND SEXTORTION OF [REDACTED]

21. TextNow, Inc. records showed a conversation on or about January 16, 2021, between the user of the bmike7406 account and [REDACTED] an adult male. From the context of the TextNow, Inc. records, it appears that OTTINGER likely initially used a Snapchat account to communicate with [REDACTED]. It is not clear from the context of the conversation whether OTTINGER communicated with [REDACTED] as himself, as “Rachel,” or as some other persona. The interaction was as follows:

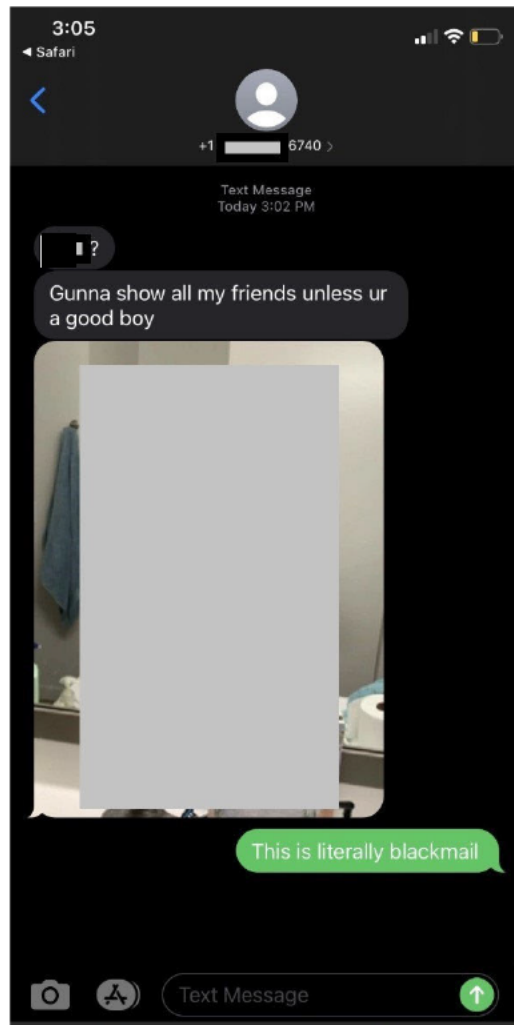
bmike7406- [REDACTED]
 bmike7406- [Image file ending with 3511c51a17ce.jpeg, an image depicting [REDACTED] posing fully nude in a bathroom mirror. The image appears to be a screenshot from the Snapchat application.]
 bmike7406- Gunna show all my friends unless ur a good boy
 [REDACTED] This is literally blackmail
 [REDACTED] That would be sexual assault and I have a good lawyer
 [REDACTED] I'd urge you to reconsider
 bmike7406- ðŸŒ£¹³
 [REDACTED] you said you wouldn't screenshot yet here we are
 [REDACTED] look just delete my pictures, my number, and forget I exist
 bmike7406- nah

22. On or about February 3, 2021, I interviewed [REDACTED] telephonically. [REDACTED] recalled the above conversation and recalled that the person with whom he communicated used the name “Rachel Meyer” and pictures of a young woman. The conversation originated on Tinder,¹⁴ then moved to Snapchat. “Rachel Meyer” asked [REDACTED] for sexually

¹³ From my training and experience, I am aware this was likely sent as a viewable emoji, but has been decoded to these text-based symbols.

¹⁴ An online dating application.

explicit pictures and things he was not comfortable with. [REDACTED] eventually blocked “Rachel Meyer” on Snapchat. After [REDACTED] blocked “Rachel Meyer,” she contacted him by text message. [REDACTED] kept a screenshot of the text messages with “Rachel Meyer” and provided a copy to me. The images captured by [REDACTED] are consistent with the TextNow, Inc. records, including the sexually explicit image of [REDACTED] contained in the TextNow, Inc. account “bmike7406.” A redacted screenshot is shown below. OTTINGER’s messages appear on the left and [REDACTED]s on the right. The redacted image in grey depicts [REDACTED] standing fully naked in front of a mirror.



GOOGLE ACCOUNT CONTENT

23. As mentioned above, the investigation involved search warrants on email accounts believed to have been used by OTTINGER. One of those accounts, ccandy7862@gmail.com, received an email on or about January 10, 2021, on the subject “Welcome to ‘Exposure Game.’” The email documented registration of an account on a web forum “for adult guys only.” The username selected contains [REDACTED]’s first name.

24. In response to administrative subpoenas and search warrants (*see* 21-MJ-81 (TNL) and 21-MJ-289 (KMM)), I received records from Google LLC associated with thirteen Gmail accounts, including three containing OTTINGER’s first and last names as part of the username. Google LLC records showed the accounts were connected through association by use on common IP addresses (including at least one IP address resolving to an identified individual at OTTINGER’s Carver, Minnesota residence), use on common devices (*i.e.* accounts were accessed on the same device ID(s) or connected by cookie), by use as recovery accounts for each other (*i.e.* taylorlmaek3758@gmail.com has ccandy786@gmail.com as a recovery address), and/or through emails sent between accounts (*i.e.* mitchellottinger@gmail.com sent pictures of young females later used to send to boys or men to bmike7406@gmail.com; bmike7406@gmail.com and ccandy7862@gmail.com sent Google Drive collaboration requests for folders titled “Boys” and “Guys” to taylorlmaek3758@gmail.com). Based on this evidence, I believe all of the accounts were established, controlled, and used by OTTINGER.

25. In my review of the Google LLC records, I found evidence suggesting that OTTINGER had been engaged in sextortion and baiting/catfishing activity since at least 2012. Internet search history on the ccandy786@gmail.com account that year included searches for videos about “how to fake your webcam for chat roulette or omegle.”¹⁵ Later emails between mitchellottinger@gmail.com and taylormalek3758@gmail.com contained screenshots of an Omegle chat between a female persona and a purported 16-year-old boy along with sexually explicit images of that boy. In the following years, email activity and search history on other accounts shows OTTINGER enrolled in a newsletter for an application used to “fake” a user’s live camera¹⁶ (on mitchellottinger@gmail.com), and searched for information on “girl peace sign,” “pussy pic middle finger,” “fake kik camera,” “how to fake snap,” and “how to send pics from the photo library on Snapchat” (on mitchellottinger2@gmail.com). In my training and experience, I believe these searches together constituted research on how to successfully deploy a young, female persona or personae to lure boys and men into producing and sending sexually explicit images to OTTINGER.

¹⁵ Both are online video chat services which randomly connected users to chat partners and are commonly used by children and child pornographers alike.

¹⁶ Some chat applications—such as Snapchat and Kik—have features that allow users to distinguish between pictures taken contemporaneously on a mobile device’s camera and those uploaded from storage space. These features are intended to allow parties to know they are chatting with a depicted person. “Baiters” and “Catfishers” may use sophisticated techniques and software to defeat these features, allowing them to appear as someone they are not.

26. Many of the Google accounts were used to register online accounts for dating services such as Tinder, social media accounts using the name “Taylor,” “Rachel,” or variations thereof, and several Twitter accounts. Twitter activity in the Google accounts included email notifications to the user about incoming Twitter direct messages from Twitter accounts with display names such as “United Baits of America” and “embarassMENT.” One of the accounts sending direct messages discussed a “method” for sale, “and not for just one boy,” then wished OTTINGER “happy baiting.”

27. The Google accounts contained significant evidence attributing their ownership and use to OTTINGER. For example, mitchellottinger@gmail.com contained emails from the Minnesota Professional Educator Licensing and Standards Board with information on OTTINGER’s educator license. The account also contained emails from SCHOOL DISTRICT 1 where OTTINGER is employed as a substitute teacher and paraprofessional. The account contained an image of OTTINGER’s work badge for an identified elementary school in SCHOOL DISTRICT 1.

28. Bmike7406@gmail.com contained several emails arranging sexual encounters. These emails appear to involve other adult males. Some of these emails included an image of OTTINGER picking apples.

29. Ccandy786@gmail.com contained an email from “Mitchell Ottinger” on an email address domain controlled by the University of Minnesota. The email contained a cropped and edited version of the aforementioned image of OTTINGER picking apples. It

also contained an email from Amazon confirming an order sent to MITCHELL OTTINGER at his identified Carver, Minnesota address.

30. The taylormalek3758@gmail.com account also contained images of apparent child pornography stored in the Google Photos service. For example:

- a) On or about December 7, 2018, the user of taylormalek3758@gmail.com uploaded a file ending in -3764.jpg. The file is an image depicting a boy approximately 10-13 years of age sitting naked holding his penis. The image has text superimposed reading, "Send Daddy."
- b) On or about August 11, 2018, the user of taylormalek3758@gmail.com uploaded a file ending in -3765.jpg. The file is an image depicting prepubescent three boys sitting naked. Two of them—approximately 4-6 years of age—are in poses displaying the genitalia;
- c) On or about October 4, 2017, the user of taylormalek3758@gmail.com uploaded a file ending in -5408.mov. The video is approximately 5 minutes 12 seconds in duration and depicts an older male raping a toddler.

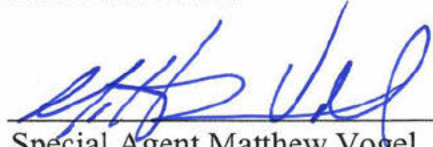
31. Based on information provided by Google LLC, these files were stored in the account and available to the user as of at least on or about April 19, 2021.

CONCLUSION

32. This investigation remains ongoing, as are victim identification efforts.

33. Based on the foregoing, I submit there is probable cause as charged in the proposed criminal complaint that MITCHELL JAMES OTTINGER, in the District of Minnesota and elsewhere, has violated 18 U.S.C. §§ 2251(a) and (e), and 18 U.S.C. 875(d).

34. Accordingly, I request that a warrant issue for the arrest of MITCHELL JAMES OTTINGER that he may be brought before this Court.



Special Agent Matthew Vogel
United States Department of Justice
Federal Bureau of Investigation

SUBSCRIBED and SWORN before me
by reliable electronic means (Zoom and
email) pursuant to Fed. R. Crim. P. 41(d)(3)
on May 3, 2021



THE HONORABLE ELIZABETH COWAN WRIGHT
UNITED STATES MAGISTRATE JUDGE